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ABSTRACT

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Abstract:

As one of the booming subsidiaries of the tourism sector, volunteer tourism (voluntourism) offers tourists, NGOs, and host communities an alternative experience through “authentically based destinations.” By definition, this should benefit destinations more in terms of cultural preservation and have less unpleasant tourism impacts. The possibilities for these destinations to develop and grow through the promotion of their cultural resources without, at the same time, spoiling them is the goal of sustainable tourism. However, without sufficient consideration of primary factors and careful destination resources management, voluntourism may lead to less sustainable tourism development. The purpose of this study is to examine whether voluntourism contributes to socio-cultural sustainability by examining the level of control over cultural resources in the host/guest relationship. Thus, the goal of this research is to examine voluntourism and determine whether it leads to cultural disturbance like mass tourism or to enhanced tourism practices through its relationship to socio-cultural sustainability. The research also examines what the central motivations and experiences of voluntourism are and if they focus on self-entertainment or helping-the-other. Finally, the research examines how this adds to social sustainability in the host/guest relationship. The research relies on qualitative research methods using in depth-interviews and participant observation of First Nations people on the Eden Valley reserve, Alberta. Volunteer tourists and organisers from the Global Citizens Network (GCN) were consulted in order to examine these issues. The research conducted suggests that organisations such as GCN can, in fact, play a positive role in cultural preservation and communication.

Key words: voluntourism, tourist motivations, tourist experiences, socio-cultural sustainability, cross-cultural sustainability.